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There are many ways of thinking that I’ve written about in previous columns that were intended to help you be more successful, but “unselfish” thinking has the potential to change your life in another way. It might even redefine how you view success.

There are many times that all of us get caught up thinking in ways that are beneficial to ourselves. It’s a human thing to do. Before helping someone, the first glimpse of a thought we often have is a revelation of how rendering that help will impact our lives. Perhaps it’s an hour of our time, a dip in our wallet, giving up an entire day or weekend, or ultimately changing our life forever by way of one big decision.

I write this column not to judge those who think about themselves before thinking of someone else. I write it to help those whose selfish thinking has imprisoned them with an unhappy life. It has been revealed by many that their lives and happiness improved drastically when they reached a turning point and decided to change from thinking selfishly to thinking unselfishly.

Unselfish thinking can deliver a return greater than any other kind of thinking. Here are some of its benefits:

1. Unselfish thinking brings personal fulfillment. Few things in life bring greater personal rewards than helping others. Charles H. Burr believed, “Getters generally don’t get happiness; givers get it.” Helping people brings great satisfaction. When you spend your day unselfishly serving others, at night you can lay down your head with no regrets and sleep soundly. In *Bringing Out the Best in People*, Alan Loy McGinnis remarked, “There is no more noble occupation in the world than to assist another human being--to help someone succeed.”

Even if you have spent much of your life pursuing selfish gain, it’s never too late to have a change of heart. Even the most miserable person can turn their life around and make a difference for others.

That’s what Alfred Nobel did. When he saw his own obituary in the newspaper because the editor accidentally wrote about him instead of his brother (who actually died), he realized he needed to change his thinking and his life’s purpose. The obituary referenced that the explosives Alfred Nobel’s company produced had killed many people throughout the world. At that point, realizing that he was a selfish-thinking money-maker creating harm to other people, he changed his ways and vowed to promote peace and acknowledge contributions to humanity. That is how the Nobel Peace Prizes came into being.

2. Unselfish thinking adds value to others. In 1904, Bessie Anderson Stanley wrote the following definition of success in *Brown Book* magazine:

“He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has enjoyed the trust of pure women, the respect of intelligent men, and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has never lacked appreciation of Earth’s beauty or failed to express it; who has left the world better than he found it, whether an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction.”

When you get outside of yourself and make a contribution to others, you really begin to live.

3. Unselfish thinking encourages other virtues. When you see a 4-year-old, you expect to observe selfishness. But when you see it in a 40-year-old, it’s not very attractive.

Of all the qualities a person can pursue, unselfish thinking seems to make the biggest difference toward cultivating other virtues. That’s because the ability to give unselfishly is so difficult. It goes against the grain of human nature. But if you can learn to think unselfishly and become a giver, then it becomes easier to develop many other virtues: gratitude, love, respect, patience, discipline, etc.

4. Unselfish thinking increases quality of life. The spirit of generosity created by unselfish thinking gives people an appreciation for life and an understanding of its higher values. Seeing those in need and giving to meet that need puts a lot of things into perspective. It increases the quality of life of the giver and the receiver. If you want to improve your world, then focus attention on helping others.

5. Unselfish thinking makes you part of something greater than yourself. Merck and Company, the global pharmaceutical corporation, has always seen itself as doing more than just producing products and making a profit. It desires to serve humanity. It exemplified this when it developed a drug to cure river blindness, a disease that infects and causes blindness in millions of people, particularly in developing countries. However, people in those countries couldn’t afford to pay for the drug. So what did Merck do? It developed the drug anyway and gave it away for free to anyone who needed it.

George W. Merck said, “We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for profits. The profits follow, and if we have remembered that, they have never failed to appear.” This lesson is simple. As important as it is to be great, it is just as important to be part of something greater than yourself.

6. Unselfish thinking creates a legacy. Jack Balousek, executive leader at True North Communications, said: “Learn, earn, return--these are the three phases of life. The first third should be devoted to education, the second third to building a career and making a living, and the last third to giving back to others--returning something in gratitude. Each state seems to be a preparation for the next one.”

Being successful may allow you to leave an inheritance *for* others, but if you desire to do more, to create a legacy, then you will leave something *in* others. It is in this capacity that your unselfish thinking and investment in others will outlive you.

~ The End ~